



**JOHN HACKETT**  
DIRECTOR  
EVENT RECRUITMENT

# Cultural fit

A bad recruitment decision can be expensive, says John Hackett, especially if you fail to determine whether a candidate will fit with your company culture.

The time and cost involved in advertising, reviewing response and interviewing suitable candidates highlights the need for a selection process that will be as comprehensive as possible so, in the majority of cases, the right employee is identified and recruited into your business.

While it is important to identify a future employee based on their skills and experience, assessing the cultural fit between an individual and the organisation is another valuable strategy that can help produce better outcomes in hiring decisions. In fact, there is strong evidence to suggest that getting cultural fit right has a direct impact on an organisation's success and profitability.

So what is cultural fit? The culture of an organisation comprises individual personalities as well as the experiences of employees and resulting behaviours formed by them as a group. It includes work methods employed, the team orientation of an organisation and its management style. Cultural fit is the compatibility between individual and organisational values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours.

Even though a candidate's knowledge, experience and skills are very important in ensuring a new employee's initial success in the job, these factors will become less important as their responsibilities change and as they develop their expertise. On the other hand, an employee's values, beliefs and attitudes are not as likely to significantly change over time. Therefore, cultural fit is very hard to foster between an individual and an organisation - the fit between them is either there or it isn't.

We've all heard the expression "they were like a square peg in a round hole". As a result, the level of cultural fit between a potential employee and an organisation can be a good determiner of whether a hiring decision will be a longer term success.

Poor cultural fit can result in low morale, decreased productivity, high staff turnover and ultimately dissatisfied clients. In order to minimise these risks, employers need to not only have a detailed understanding of the requirements of the position being filled but also identify the culture within their organisation and use appropriate tools to assess cultural fit when recruiting new employees.

Before employers begin the hiring process they should think about the kind of person they believe will succeed in the role, taking into consideration factors such as level of autonomy and team work required, whether the position requires a leader or a follower in the group, the level of decision-making required, the kind of person who has succeeded (or failed) in the past, etc. This

will help them determine the type of personality traits needed to succeed for any given position.

Equally, employers need to assess and understand the culture of their organisation. This can be achieved by observing employees on the job – looking at how they interact with each other as well as with management and vice versa, considering how conflicts are resolved, how people express their emotions, how the physical work space is presented, etc. Employers should also ask employees for their input. Consider questions such as "How would you describe this organisation to others?", "What would you like to change?", "What kind of person would not succeed in this workplace?" and "What do you like the most about this organisation?"

When advertising a position attempt to also reveal the organisation's culture to help attract suitable candidates from the outset. Then, when interviewing potential employees, employers need to try and screen for cultural fit.

Don't just rely on "first impressions" but prepare a list of appropriate motivational and behavioural questions that will attempt to reveal cultural fit. For example, ask candidates what they find desirable and undesirable in an ideal job and organisation, their individual attitudes to factors such as teamwork, risk taking and flexibility in working hours, etc. Compare the candidate's answers with the profile you have already established on your organisation to determine how you are tracking. Also, consider panel interviews made up of colleagues and supervisors who can provide their input and other points of view.

Reference checking is also important and the same questions you would ask of a candidate can be directed to a referee to re-confirm their perceived cultural fit. If appropriate, trial work periods on a temporary basis and pre-employment social get-togethers with staff can assist in screening cultural fit as well.

By considering the cultural fit of prospective employees for your organisation you should not only improve the success rate of employing the right person but also minimise costs and hopefully staff turnover. **m**

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